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ABSTRACT

An examination of five social studies textbook series for grades one through four reveals a lack of consistent application of geographic concepts from publisher to publisher as well as a lack of reinforcement of previous learning within the individual series. This disjointed presentation of textbook materials contributes to a disjointed learning process and hinders the transfer of learning. The absence of commonly used concepts also has serious implications with regard to identifying reasonable questions and answers for standardized achievement tests. The five specific aspects examined which reveal these disparities are: (1) the number of geographic concepts used in geographic textbooks compared to other social studies disciplines; (2) the geographic concepts actually used in the texts; (3) a comparison of the general geographic concepts used with the fundamental geographic concepts; (4) the most frequently appearing geographic concepts in the textbook; and (5) a comparison of the National Council for Geographic Education and the Association of American Geographers list of recommended concepts to be taught in elementary grades with the most frequently cited concepts used in the five series. This examination also reveals considerable variation in presentation of place locations, maps, and map reading skills. The variety of places in the world does not correspond with the Guidelines for Geographic Education's emphasis on learning about local geography from first hand experience. Tables referring to the five aspects examined in the texts, references, and a list of the texts examined are included. (PPB)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE GEOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS AND LOCATIONS IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS GRADES ONE THROUGH FOUR

by

Mary E. Haas

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE GEOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS AND LOCATIONS IN ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS GRADES ONE THROUGH FOUR

Introduction

Geographers are concerned because the American population is uninformed about geography. Even such simple tasks as locating important places in the United States have been shown to be beyond the abilities of large numbers of high school graduates. Therefore, geographers have launched efforts to improve the geographic knowledge of Americans by improving the teaching of geography in the schools.

Geographers are not the only group with suggestions to make about the schools' curriculum. The entire elementary social studies curriculum has been receiving much criticism and many suggestions for change. The present social studies curriculum has been criticized as a curriculum based upon an outdated philosophy and without a sound psychological base.(Akenson, 1987; LeRiche, 1987; Morrissett et al., 1980; Superka & Hawke, 1980; Hartoonian & Laughlin, 1986; Engle & Ochoa, 1986). Geographers should be interested in such criticisms as they may bring about changes in the curriculum which can influence both the amount and type of geography taught to children in the future.

Other critics have approached the elementary social studies curriculum by examining the content of the textbooks. The examination of the textbooks they explain reveals much of what is taught in the schools as the textbooks are reported to be used at sometime during every lesson in 90% of the classrooms. Another

indication of the influence of the textbooks is the finding that the vast majority of classes use the single textbook as the major source of information. (Superka et al., 1980) Critics of the textbooks conclude that the books are superficial and bland in their treatment of topics. (Larkins et al., 1987; Woodward et al., 1986).

This research study examines the content of elementary textbooks (grades 1-4) by looking at the geographic concepts and places mentioned. It seeks to find what concepts and locations are presented at each grade. By examining the concepts it is possible to infer the more complex types of content that students have the potential to learn from the textbooks. This is done by using the structure of the Gagne Hierarchy of Learning. (Gagne, 1970) A comparison is also made with the five themes of geography and concepts identified in the Guidelines for Geographic Education to see if the concepts in the textbooks are those recommended by geographers for the appropriate grades.

Gagne (1970) in his Hierarchy of Learning identifies eight types of learning. In this educational hierarchy the ability to successfully perform at a higher level precludes the ability to use the lower levels of the hierarchy. The first five types of learning are Signal Learning, Stimulus-Response Learning, Chaining, Verbal Association and Discrimination Learning. Successful performance in all of these types of learning must occur before students begin to learn an academic discipline. Learning the content and skills of an academic discipline such as geography requires learning of the types 6 through 8 of the

hierarchy. The three most complex types of learning are Concept Learning, Rule Learning, and Problem Solving.

According to Gagne when we solve problems, we apply rules which are true relationships between concepts. The concepts are classes of information. The concepts are labels for which there are many examples. To define concepts as the vocabulary of a discipline is not quite accurate, but concepts have many of the characteristics that a vocabulary definition has. Concepts in geography include such nouns as climate, population, areal association, and landform. Rule learning is mastering the true relationship between the concepts. A rule that relates the concepts of continent and region is, "A continent can be divided into many regions." While, "How can economic development be implemented in Ethiopia so as to reduce the impact of periodic drought and famine?" is an example of a problem that geographers might address. To answer such a problem it is necessary to apply a number of rules (multiple relationships) between such concepts as economic growth, natural resources, transportation, climate, landforms and culture that apply to the place called Ethopia.

Textbook analysis is a type of research that has come of age since 1960. Hundreds of studies examine the content of books for: 1. the treatment of specific groups, 2. the treatment of themes within books and 3. the treatment of specific events. It is the treatment of groups and themes that dominate research efforts. (Siler,1986-87) The specific methods used in textbook analysis vary with the questions of individual studies. Many report their results as subjective impressions documented only with selective quotations. Others carefully define terms and establish lists of

required content and report or rate the coverage on those criteria. Such procedures are less subject. The most analytical method is a count of the presence or amount of space devoted to a group or topic. Although these studies are the most duplicatable, they equate quantity with quality which may or may not be a true relationship.

Literature Analyzing Geography Textbooks

Secondary level texts in geography have been analyzed for the treatment of slavery in geography textbooks written before the civil war (Shali, 1963) and for the presence of environmental determinism in the secondary geography textbooks dating from 1900 to 1970. (Jackson, 1976) Both of these researchers described their findings and used sample quotations to support their conclusions. Shali reported that over time authors became less critical of the institution of slavery. Jackson concluded that environmental determinism remainded an important theme in secondary textbooks for twenty years after university geographers had abandoned it as a central theme.

Hawkins (1977) classified the map and globe activities in three elementary textbook series and counted the number of activities of each type in the books for grades 1-6 of the series. He found that the series inadequately taught the determination of the flow of water from data on a map and the computation of time differences through the use of longitude. Those skills which were given adequate or heavy treatment we the six categories of identifying map and globe terms; using compass arrows to find

direction; selecting appropriate materials to collect information; computing distance with a scale; using maps to infer, predict, and draw conclusions; and identifying the causes of day and night or seasonal changes. He recommended that authors change their texts by scaling down the space devoted to identification and recall of places and terms and increase the more "functional" and "transferable" skills.

Questions Being Examined

There are five specific questions asked about the geographic content in the primary textbooks.

1. How does the number of geographic concepts compare with the number of concepts from other social science disciplines in the textbooks for social studies in grades 1-4?
2. What geographic concepts are in the textbooks?
3. Are the concepts in the textbooks the fundamental concepts?
4. What are the most frequently appearing geographic concepts in the textbooks?
5. What place locations are named in the textbooks?

The answers to these five questions help to identify the specifics and the possible higher levels of understanding and knowledge that may be presented in the elementary series. Such information is important for both curriculum reform and for

identifying questions that students might reasonably be expected to answer on a valid achievement test.

The Sample

The sample for the study is the first through fourth grade elementary books in five elementary social studies series published by major textbook publishers between 1983 and 1985. Four of the series (Laidlaw, Heath, Silver Burdett, and Scott Foresman) are widely used in the U.S. The fifth series produced by Follett was completed shortly before the sale of the company and has not been as widely adopted as the other four. The elementary textbooks for grades 5 & 6 stress U. S. and World History. The differences in the nature of history and the social sciences as disciplines mean that the application of the data gathering methods in this study are not appropriate for examining the 5th and 6th grade books.

Procedures

The definition of concept applied in the study is that of Gagne (1970) a class of objects or, stated another way, a noun classification based upon common characteristics. This definition is also the same definition that Stanley (1984) reports is used by the authors of many social studies methods textbooks which are used in the prepartation of teachers.

The researcher read the text of all 20 books and recorded all of the concepts named. Concepts whose meanings were described but

not named were not recorded. The presence of the concept in the text was what was recorded not the number of times a concept appeared.

Rules governing the recording of the concepts included:

1. Concepts were not combined or grouped together based upon a common root definition. The single exception was the plural and singular of a concept were considered as identical. Therefore, if either the word "immigrant" or "immigrants" appeared in a book, the concept immigrant was recorded for the book while the word "immigration" was counted as an additional concept.
2. The concepts were classified into those that were fundamental to the discipline and those that were not fundamental. Concepts fundamentalto the discipline are of a more general nature. The concept "landform" is a fundamental concept while the very specific concepts of mountain or plain are not considered as fundamental. To determine if a concept was fundamental to the structure of the academic discipline, the concept had to be identified as such. The authorities on the fundamental concepts in this study are three authors of elementary social studies methods textbooks who discuss concepts in detail and list a large number of concepts as examples for each of the disciplines. The list of fundamental concepts identified in this study is the compilation of the concepts identified by Banks (1977), Ellis (1981), and Michaelis (1986).

Trends In the Data

Table 1 indicates the number of concepts of all social science disciplines present in each of the 20 primary textbooks. The totals clearly illustrate that there are considerable differences in the representation of the disciplines among the various publishers. There is a steady increase in the number of

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Insert Table 1 about here

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concepts presented between individual grades. At grade 1 four of the publishers include fewer than 10 concepts. There is a big increase in the number of concepts between grades 2 and 3. There are many more geography concepts presented to the students than from any other discipline. A total of 59% of the concepts in the books are geographic.

Not only is the representativeness of the disciplines unequal but the representativeness of the disciplines in the individual grades is also quite lopsided. Economics clearly dominates the content of both the first and second grade books. With the single exception of the Scott, Foresman series the third and fourth grade books are clearly the domain of geography. In grade 3 geography has from 2 to 5 times the number of concepts as any other discipline. The percent of geographic concepts in the sample ranges from 44-73% of the total number of concepts in the third grade books. In grade 4 geography represents twice the number of

Table 1

Number of Concepts by Grade, Publisher, and Discipline

Gr.	Publisher	Pol.Sc.	Geog.	Econ.	Soc.	Hist.	Total
01	Heath	0	8	12	1	0	21
01	Follett	1	0	5	1	1	8
01	Laidlaw	2	0	2	1	1	6
01	Scott	1	1	3	1	1	7
01	Silver	0	1	4	0	1	6
02	Heath	6	1	7	0	1	15
02	Follett	5	13	13	0	0	31
02	Laidlaw	4	0	5	3	1	13
02	Scott	10	10	7	4	4	35
02	Silver	9	0	12	0	0	21
03	Heath	14	30	15	1	0	60
03	Follett	2	40	8	2	2	54
03	Laidlaw	11	27	6	2	3	49
03	Scott	18	46	19	4	16	103
03	Silver	5	43	14	0	0	62
04	Heath	6	42	15	7	21	91
04	Follett	9	71	5	8	3	96
04	Laidlaw	1	52	23	2	2	80
04	Scott	31	13	14	5	13	76
04	Silver	9	92	26	16	21	164
	totals	124	490	215	58	91	988

concepts of all other disciplines and within individual books the range is from 46% to 73% of the concepts.

Table 2 illustrates the total number of different concepts by publisher and academic discipline. Again, the domination of

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Insert Table 2 about here

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geography and economics over the other disciplines is evident. Several additional trends are also evident. 1. There is a Chi-square difference in the number of concepts presented by the various publishers significant at the .001 level. 2. The Scott, Foresman series has the most balanced presentation of the disciplines. 3. Silver Burdett is the series with the greatest total number of concepts presented to the students. They rank first in the number of concepts presented from geography, economics, and sociology. 4. Laidlaw with a total of 148 concepts presents the fewest number of concepts. However, Laidlaw does not rank last in all of the discipline lists; Laidlaw ranks third in the number of geographic concepts.

Even though their is a statistically significant difference in the number of concepts presented in the different series, quality does not necessarily equate with quantity. All concepts are not of equal importance in learning the content of an academic discipline. Some concepts are considered fundamental to a discipline in that they provide the basis for true and logical relationships while other concepts serve as examples of those fundamental concepts. Learning at the rules and problem solving

Table 2

Total Number of Concepts Textbooks by Publisher and Discipline

discipline	Follett	Heath	Laidlaw	Scott	Silver
geography	124	81	79	70	136
political sc	17	26	18	60	23
economics	31	49	36	43	56
sociology	11	9	8	14	16
history	6	22	7	34	22
totals	189	187	148	221	253

levels of the Gagne Hierarchy of Learning is not possible unless the students learn the fundamental concepts.

Table 3 illustrates the number of fundamental concepts in the disciplines present in each of the elementary series. The majority of the concepts are not those identified by the authorities as fundamental to the disciplines. Again the three disciplines of geography, political science, and economics appear in greater number. Four of the series have from 20-25 percent of their total concepts as fundamental while the Heath series has only 12% of its concepts as fundamental to the discipline. While the actual number or percent of the fundamental concepts may appear low when just examining the numbers, the using of concepts as examples of fundamental concepts has sound educational value and the reader is cautioned against concluding the superiority of a series based upon the numbers in Table 3. Low numbers should not be interpreted as a poor presentation of concepts.

Insert Table 3 about here

Of the total number of geography concepts 101 are of landforms or bodies of water, 31 refer to regions of the world associated with types of vegetation (desert and rainforest), 109 relate to globes, maps and the atlas, 56 are urban concepts and 12 are associated with rural settlement patterns. Using concepts as examples of other concepts is a sound procedure. A textbook series that takes the position that it wants to provide a large

Table 3

Number of Concepts in Textbooks which Authorities Identify as Fundamental by Publisher and Discipline

Discipline	Follett	Heath	Laidlaw	Scott	Silver
geography	20	7	20	13	31
political sc	8	9	5	17	7
economics	6	7	7	10	9
sociology	2	1	1	5	1
history	2	0	4	9	2
total	38	24	37	54	50
percent	20	13	25	24	20

number of examples for concepts, may reduce the number of fundamental concepts presented but make a better presentation of what it does include. The data from this study does not address this possibility.

Within this study the concern about the frequency of concept inclusion is addressed in two ways. First with an analysis of the numbers of concepts in various categories and secondly by examining the actual concepts that appear most frequently.

Table 4, names the geographic concepts that appear in at least 5 books within the sample. The "No." column gives the number of books that present the concept. The "No. publishers" column indicates how many of the 5 series provide the opportunity for a child to learn the concept at sometime within grades 1-4. The column "grade range" tells at what grade levels the concept appears. The star symbol indicates a concept considered fundamental to the study of the discipline.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 4 reveals that there is no agreement on the appropriate grade level for presenting any of the most frequently appearing concepts. Perhaps more importantly there is little unanimous agreement (4 of 24) on the inclusion of the concepts by the publishers. Another 14 (58%) appear in 4 of the series and the remaining 6 (26%) appear in only 3 series. The Silver Burdett series contains all of the 24 frequently appearing geographic

concepts. Each of the other four publishers is missing from three to eleven of the 24 concepts. Those who claim that the textbooks are all the same and that there is a common curriculum in social studies at the primary level find little in these charts to support their position. Although there may be a commonly offered theme called the expanding environment or horizons as indicated by text titles, presentations of the knowledge of the academic discipline does not appear to be as commonly provided. Certainly this has implications for the validity of standardized achievement tests if nothing else.

A second way of examining the most frequently occurring concepts is to look at the actual concepts presented and how they can be linked together to form what Gagne (1970) calls rules or true relationships between the concepts. These rules are more difficult to learn than the individual concepts but provide the logical linkages and greater depth in the content of the discipline.

Rules that can be formed from the most frequently occurring geography concepts include:

1. The large rivers flow from the mountains through the plateaus and plains into the oceans.
2. Transportation has enabled people to move from the city to the suburbs and has increased the both the size and number of suburbs.
3. Cities are centers of transportation.
4. The compass rose shows the cardinal directions and the in-between directions.

5. Many cities are located on oceans, lakes, and rivers where water transportation is available.
6. Transportation through the mountains and plateaus is more difficult than it is over the plains.
7. The climate of a place has a direct relationship on the population that the area can support.
8. The climates of a continent vary with its distance from the equator.
9. In the atlas you can find the names and locations of many mountains, plains, rivers, lakes, cities, deserts, oceans, peninsulas, and plateaus.

10. The equator is equal distance between the North and South poles.

Implications of the Findings

Whereas there may be additional rules that can be made with the concepts, it is necessary to consider some problems and omissions with the list of concepts and sample rules generated. An examination of the rules raises important concerns. Can a satisfactory curriculum for grades 1-4 be limited to these few rules? Are there sufficient rules to enable students to solve geographic problems or explain the role of geography in events? Are there other important rules that need to be included to make the learning more comprehensive and less spotty? Some of the rules such as numbers 7 and 8 are over simplifications and only accurate under certain circumstances. The failure of the

textbooks to include additional fundamental concepts in the text means that a more accurately stated rule might not be understood by the children. It does seem strange that the geographic concepts of map and globe do not appear more frequently in the textbooks. Especially, since the teaching of map and globe skills is present in all of the elementary grades as illustrated by elaborate map and globe scope and sequence skill charts in all of the teachers' guides.

The number of concepts and the frequency of their presentation in the various textbooks indicates that few concepts are presented at multiple grade levels. Therefore, it would appear that the series provide little review of previously learned content and extension of the content at subsequent grade levels. This might be an indication that publishers are more interested in teaching map and globe skills than the content of geography. Another explanation might be that they do not believe that children are interested in or can learn the content of geography.

Whatever the reasons the lack of an agreement on content and the lack of reinforcement of the learning between grades are serious problems. Presenting a concept at various grade levels with different content is commonly referred to as the spiral curriculum and discussed in many social studies methods books. (Michaelis, 1986; Banks, 1977; & Ellis 1981) By using the spiral curriculum approach, concepts are reinforced through the grades and the depth and importance of the meanings elaborated. The small number of occurrences of the same concept at different grade

Table 4

Most Frequently Included Geography Concepts

No.	Concept	Grade range	No. publishers
11	mountain	1-4	4
9	plain	1-4	5
8	river	3-4	4
7	continent*	2-4	4
7	equator*	2-4	5
7	suburb	3-4	5
7	transportation*	2-4	5
6	community*	2-4	4
6	North pole	2-4	4
6	South pole	2-4	4
6	lake	1-4	3
5	atlas	1-4	3
5	cardinal directions	2-4	4
5	cities	3-4	3
5	climate*	3-4	4
5	compass rose	3-4	4
5	desert	3-4	3
5	hemisphere	3-4	4
5	in-between directions	3-4	3
5	ocean	2-4	4
5	peninsula	3-4	4
5	plateau	3-4	4

Table 4 (continued)

5	population*	3-4	3
5	scale	3-4	4

* indicates fundamental to discipline

levels indicates that this attempt is not being made by most series in the sample. However, the series do apply the spiral curriculum principle to the process skills including the map and globe skills previously mentioned. The argument that the primary grade content learning is necessary for the vocabulary and concept formation of students in the middle grades and secondary schools is difficult to make if the vocabulary and concepts are not in the books.

The rule learning and problem solving levels of learning within geography are limited by the concepts presented. (Gagne, 1970) Because there are few fundamental concepts which textbook publishers have agreed are important to teach to elementary students and because most concepts presented are not fundamental to geography, children are severely limited in geographic knowledge. The lack of systematic presentation of the concepts and their relationships to higher levels of learning provides for disjointed learning. This disjointed presentation violates many principles of information processing which psychologists have studied in recent years. Disjointed presentations do not contribute to the ability of the learner to recognize important ideas and conclusions, and they severly handicap students in recalling what they have learned and applying their learning to the world outside of a specific lesson. Thus, transfer of learning is not encouraged. Examining the rules that can be made by linking the concepts appearing most frequently in the sample appears to confirm what others have declared. Important, meaningful geographic content is not presented in the elementary textbooks. Nor do the texts require students to do much of the

critical thinking required to form rules and solve problems. Instead, the textbook publishers have selected a method of presentation that encourages the learning of isolated facts which are quickly forgotten.

It is understandable that textbook publishers do not want to produce books that are identical to that of the competition, nor do school systems probably want identical textbooks as this would decrease local control. However, the academic disciplines do have specific vocabularies that are necessary for citizens to learn and understand so that they will be able to question and understand the specialists they hire or otherwise encounter through the media.

The Geographers' CurriculumGrades 1-4

The National Council for Geographic Education and The Association of American Geographers have identified important concepts that they believe should be taught in the primary grades. Table 5 lists the geographic concepts identified by the geographers. A comparison of Tables 4 and 5 shows little commonalty.

Insert Table 5 about here

Clearly the vocabulary recommended by geographers for the primary grades is not being presented to the students. The textbooks

frequently fail to use such important geographic terms as location, region, and environment. Nine of the concepts frequently presented in the textbooks do deal with maps and globes and are a part of the location theme in geography. Another 9 concepts are landforms or bodies of water which might be used to describe a place or region. Several terms are associated with settlement geography and the role of transportation as a link between the settlement concepts does provide the potential to deal with the idea of interaction. However, it appears that the textbooks devote most of their efforts to describing the physical characteristics of places and learning about locations at the national and global levels.

The most striking difference between the textbooks and the Guidelines for Geographic Education is the geographers emphasis on learning about the local geography from first hand experiences whereas the description of a variety of places in the world is the content of textbooks. Geographers appear to have a better understanding of the cognitive and psychological needs of children than the textbook publishers.

Learning Locations

Boehm and Petersen (1987) remind us, the teaching of place names and locations has been a traditional assignment for elementary geography. Applying a counting method to determine the place locations in the textbooks has several difficulties. First, one needs to determine the words that designate a location. Do you count only the proper names or should nationalities be

considered equal to nations? Should natural regions be counted as a location or only political places? Do you count all locations that appear on a map or only those that are also mentioned in the text or questions related to the map? Do you count the locations on charts? Second, textbooks present locations in a variety of places. However, these places may not have equal impact on students. There is no guarantee that students read the captions on pictures, look in detail at maps in the text, use an atlas section of the book, or even read the text. An atlas or map skill section which includes a wide variety of maps isolated from the body of the text is found in many textbooks. Therefore, since the assumption that students actually learn to locate the places mentioned in the textbook is probably in error, the textbooks can provide only the potential for learning locations. Most of what students actually learn depends upon the tasks which teachers require the students to perform.

There is considerable variation in the ways individual series and textbooks present locations and maps. This variety prohibits both the use of a counting method and concise tables to present the data on place locations. Therefore, only the trends in the data are described. The number of place locations increases with the grade level and are not limited to the U. S. In grade 1 the locations are all nations. Nations and states dominate the locations in grade 2 while cities, the theme of the third grade texts, are added in grade 3. Most landforms, landmarks and climatic regions appear at grade 4.

Textbooks have a tendency to include several examples from Africa, South America, Asia, Latin America, or Europe. However,

Table 5

Geographic Concepts Recommended by the Guidelines for Geographic Education

region
interdependence
global interdependence
interactions
human interactions
human environment
physical environment
micro environment
environmental change
environmental relationship
exact location
relative location
characteristics of a place
region
neighborhood
landscape

Source: Guidelines for Geographic Education pages 11-13.

each publisher selects its own nations or cities to discuss. Therefore, a child using one series might learn about Kenya and Thailand while another child studying a different series might learn about Nigeria and Taiwan. Small scale maps with many locations appear as early as the second grade. The third and fourth grade books include an atlas section in addition to the maps in the main portion of the text. Clearly, if a teacher wants to make a concentrated effort to have students learn locations, several of the third and all fourth grade books provide adequate resources.

Conclusions

Clearly, there is a need to pay greater attention to the content of geography presented in the elementary textbooks. The geographic vocabulary presented in the textbooks does not reflect the fundamental concepts and themes studied by geographers. Important fundamental ideas from learning theories are not applied in the textbooks to assist students to remember what they do learn. The texts also dwell upon selected locations and do not encourage the examination of geography in the local landscape or encourage practice of map skills in the local environment. Clearly, there is a need for geographers to continue their efforts to bring about reforms in the presentation of geography in the textbooks and in the state guidelines for curriculum and to provide examples of the best ways to teach geography. At the same time there is the need for additional research on both the

goegraphic content and the way that content is presented to students in the textbooks.

Researchers and those who write and interpret tests for social studies should be advised of the lack of agreement in both the locations and content of geography presented in the textbooks. To attain content validity for their instruments, they must write questions that test the content presented to all of the students. This study shows that the range of fair questions in both content and locations is quite limited. This study also presents reasons to doubt the assumptions made about achievement tests and other instruments used to determine geographic literacy in the U. S. Additional research on the content of tests as they reflect the content of the actual curriculum students receive is needed before studies on the effectiveness of the current movement in geographic education are conducted.

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